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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 HARARE 000752

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR SDELISI, LAROIAN, MRAYNOR  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, D. TEITELBAUM  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER  
DS/OP/AF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: WHITHER THE MDC

REF: A. HARARE 716

[B](#). HARARE 649

[C](#). HARARE 401

[D](#). 3/16/04 E-MAIL FROM BESMER TO RAYNOR

[E](#). 2003 HARARE 2412

[F](#). 2003 HARARE 1359

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: The fledgling opposition MDC is suffering from some basic but critical problems: infighting within the higher ranks, insufficient communication and consultation with the broader membership, despondency, and increasing criticism from within the party. These factors coupled with ZANU-PF's increasingly aggressive posture and upper hand in all aspects of political life in Zimbabwe are reducing public confidence in the MDC's ability to bring about political change. END SUMMARY.

Institution Building

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[2](#). (C) On April 4 - 5 the MDC leadership participated in an organizational strengthening workshop in which consultants presented a strategy and program to assess the talents of MDC leadership and staff to position them appropriately within the organization. The MDC President, Vice-President, Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, National

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Chairman and Treasurer, the so-called "top six", participated in the exercise which included a personality assessment. MDC MP Roy Bennett, who helped organize the workshop, said that the talents and leadership positions of President Morgan Tsvangirai, the Secretary General Welshman Ncube, and the

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Deputy Secretary General Gift Chimankire were confirmed. The others did less well, but it was unclear what immediate impact the exercise would have on their positions. Bennett said most officials would undergo the assessment in a major reorganization of the party to occur in the coming months.

[3](#). (C) The party is being reorganized with a focus on contesting the March 2005 general Parliamentary elections. The "top six" will focus on strategy, and an elections coordinator will oversee all of the party's operations. The coordinator will head up an elections directorate, which is to be organizationally located within the President's office. During the April 4 - 5 meeting, it was decided that MDC staffer and CEO of First Mutual (a local insurance company), Ian Makoni, would be the elections coordinator. Bennett said Makoni's role in that position was decided by the MDC leadership, rather than by personality assessment.

[4](#). (C) The consultants, Dren Nupen, Mandlha Mutungu and Alan Bruce, are senior members of the South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC), who have reportedly worked on organizational strengthening with the ANC for several years. Bennett said that the initiative for the consultants and reorganization came from within the MDC, and funding for the consultants came from the Swedes and Norwegians. The initiative to bring in outside consultants to help the MDC reorganize itself came out of organizational conflicts that surfaced most notably after the June 2003 failed "final push" (Ref F). The results of the workshop and way forward with restructuring were presented to the 37-member MDC national executive on April 10 - 11. The consultants will reportedly continue to work with the MDC for the foreseeable future.

Elections Playing Field

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[5](#). (C) In an April 29 briefing to Harare-based diplomats, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai reiterated the party's five demands for leveling the elections playing field: end political violence, repeal repressive legislation, establish an independent elections commission, open the voters' roll early and hold voting on a single day, and restore ballot

secrecy. Although he said these reforms were essential, Tsvangirai did not explain how the party was going to press

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for them. Tsvangirai said the party was focused on preparing for the March 2005 elections, but was still considering a boycott and would decide later whether to participate.

#### Planning Mass Action

16. (C) MDC staff members said that during the April 4 - 5 workshop, the leadership approved plans for mass action, but groundwork to carry out that effort was still in its infancy. Dennis Murira, personal assistant to the Party Chairman and mass action coordinator said that the primary purpose of the planned demonstrations would be to influence the government to acquiesce to the MDC's elections demands.

17. (C) MDC Director of Presidential Affairs, Gandhi Mudzingwa, said it would take considerable time to organize for mass action. The strategy envisioned three phases: strengthen grassroots support at the village level (April to May), consolidate, test and review party structures (June to July), and stage mass action in about August. Mudzingwa acknowledged that party morale was at a low point, but he compared the party's present low-morale to the low point before the successful March 2003 stayaway, after which the party had a major rebound.

18. (C) Mudzingwa and Murira said that mass action would be carried out with a broad alliance of civic groups: the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Zimbabwe Liberators' Platform (ZLP), the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (Crisis). Each organization would be expected to mobilize its memberships to participate. The MDC would invite other NGOs to participate. The MDC hoped that ZLP with its connections to the security forces would be able to discourage the police and army from responding violently. The officials said that previous stayaways (work stoppages) did not effectively influence the government and that protest marches were required.

19. (C) Murira said protests would take place in high-density suburbs nationwide as church-led events in which MDC members would march from a church to a city hall or a police station where they would deliver petitions, cards or flowers urging non-violence. Murira said there would be "rolling" mass actions for as long as the MDC could sustain them, until and unless the government acquiesced to any of the opposition's demands.

#### Organizational Conflicts

10. (C) MDC Mayors, MPs, provincial chairpersons, councilors, and street-level activists have described organizational weaknesses that afflict the party. Frequent complaints were that one or more leaders is leaking information to ZANU-PF, that the leadership imposes decisions on the membership without consultation, that public statements have not been cleared properly, that candidates were not selected properly, that MDC MPs have fought with MDC staff members over party responsibilities, and that general communication has broken down between the leadership and provincial structures and between the leadership and the membership. Officials who distrust and or despise each other uniformly agreed that the early April series of meetings and workshops to address organizational issues was a good idea and they would accept the outcome of that process.

11. (C) Mudzingwa suggested in advance of the workshop that the solution to the rift problem between MDC staffers and MPs was to "ignore" the MPs because getting them involved in mass action and other planning was "stupid" -- presumably logistically cumbersome and prone to leaks. Mudzingwa said there was a need to make the party more command oriented, rather than overly consultative.

12. (C) Just two months ago, party leaders maintained publicly and privately that there were only "perceived divisions" within the MDC, not actual ones. As the local media, including the independent press, has exposed internecine rifts, they have become more candid.

#### Membership Despondent

13. (C) MDC Mayors, MPs, provincial chairpersons, councilors, and street-level activists have commented that the MDC membership is despondent, frustrated, disillusioned and depressed. Morale was low after the March 27 - 28 defeat in the Harare suburb of Zengeza and people were confused about threats to boycott the March 2005 polls. Having fought hard, they did not understand why the party might not contest the elections. The officials said that members in both urban and

rural areas felt ignored because they have received no communication from the leadership in many months, angry because they felt the leadership had abandoned the membership and the party's principles in favor of fancy cars and nice houses in Harare, and suspicious because Tsvangirai wanted to talk to Mugabe -- a move that many members thought smacked of selling-out, a la ZAPU.

#### Adventurist Inclinations

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14. (C) Several MDC interlocutors including Tsvangirai have suggested that rogue MDC elements were inclined to mount armed resistance to the GOZ. Some MDC officials have commented that they spent significant time trying to dissuade rogue and youthful elements within the party from such inclinations. Officials have suggested that despite their discouragement, youths either from within Zimbabwe or from the thousands of young MDC members in South Africa, could strike out on their own, outside the command and control of the party leadership. Two different officials even suggested that an army mutiny was possible. There are rumors that unnamed ex-Zimbabwean farmers residing in Zambia were willing to fund an armed struggle against Mugabe.

#### Talks Ongoing?

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15. (C) There has been no recent indication that ZANU-PF would engage in formal dialogue with the MDC. Nevertheless MDC officials, notably Welshman Ncube, have suggested dialogue is still possible. Reporting on conversations the ANC consultants had had with members of Mbeki's cabinet, on April 27 Bennett said that Ncube had visited Mbeki numerous times over the past several months and had presented Mbeki with a draft constitution that was reportedly approved by both Ncube and Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa. Bennett was optimistic that once South African elections were behind him, Mbeki wanted to deliver progress on the Zimbabwe crisis. (Ncube himself paints a much more limited picture of the status of his discussions with Mbeki and Chinamasa.)

16. (C) Welshman Ncube has suggested privately that there was consensus within SADC countries that Mugabe must talk. (Note: Conversations with Botswanan (Ref C) and Zambian (Ref D) diplomats here revealed sympathies for the need for reform, but no indication that SADC countries would be willing to publicly encourage Mugabe to talk or resolve the political crisis. End note.) Ncube predicted in March that the rules for formal dialogue would be laid down and formal talks would restart in the near future. He said the MDC did not want to engage the ruling party on substantive issues before formal talks began for fear that that engagement could be construed as "talks" - further delaying the start of real negotiations.

17. (C) Lower-level MDC officials or those outside Harare expressed deep skepticism about talks. They could not understand the purpose of talks with Mugabe except as an opportunity for MDC President Tsvangirai to sell-out the membership and join ZANU-PF.

#### Criticism from Within

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18. (SBU) While there was no real public or private debate on Tsvangirai's leadership of the MDC, critics of the MDC

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President from within the party have in recent weeks been more bold in attacking Tsvangirai in the press. On March 24, maverick MDC MP for St. Mary's Job Sikhala lashed out at Tsvangirai during a Zengeza campaign rally held by Harare

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North MP Trudy Stevenson. Sikhala said the MDC's threat to boycott the March 2005 polls was dangerous, self-defeating, and gave ammunition to the party's enemies (Ref A). He asserted that Tsvangirai lacked a strategy to rule, and that the MDC leadership had a tendency to pre-empt positions without taking stock of the consequences.

19. (U) In early April a group calling itself "MDC Supporters for Democracy" (MSD) wrote a letter to Tsvangirai, sending a copy to the government-controlled weekly the Sunday Mail, criticizing the imposition of Makore as the MDC candidate in Zengeza. The leader of the group, Kurauone Chihwayi, was a frequent and controversial letter-writer to the Sunday Mail. Chihwayi called for Tsvangirai and Matongo to resign, and said MSD would continue to guard against abuse and dictatorship within the MDC.

20. (SBU) In Johannesburg on April 19, Zimbabwean MDC youths residing in South Africa reportedly criticized Tsvangirai repeatedly for lack of a strategy at an MDC public meeting.

## Financial Crisis

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¶21. (C) Compounding nearly all of the party's myriad problems is the collapse of its financial base. The mainstay of its revenue source, the commercial farm sector, has all but evaporated. The GOZ's recent take-over of Bennett's Charleswood estate was just the latest manifestation of the ruling party's priority of choking off MDC revenue. Even outside the agricultural sector, businesses are pressed to contribute to or conduct business on favorable terms with the ruling party -- and are punished if perceived to be opposition sympathizers. As a result, the party is unable to sustain meaningful operations in many parts of the country -- in part from intimidation and in part from lack of resources.

The Mashonaland West Provincial Chairman told Poloff in April, for example, that the party had totaled its only car dedicated to the province and had no means to purchase a replacement. MDC officials have complained that legal fees from the Tsvangirai treason trial, the elections challenge and other cases are the biggest drain on the MDC's scarce resources. MDC officials have repeatedly made requests to Poloff for funds, saying that their lack is a prime constraint to party activities.

## Comment

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¶22. (C) The MDC is suffering from a myriad of organizational problems, and is operating within a repressive political environment. These are major challenges for a young opposition party, but the deterioration of the economy and widespread anger against ZANU-PF provide a giant unifying and motivating force in its favor. The party as a whole seems to be lacking in its ability to coordinate its members and galvanize public frustration toward political change. Confidence in the party at many levels appears to be at an all-time low. Getting substantial numbers of Zimbabweans into the streets to demonstrate may prove an insurmountable challenge.

¶23. (C) Continued: Threatening to boycott the March 2005 polls might publicize the gross unevenness in the electoral playing field, but boycotting the 2005 polls would shut the MDC out of parliament, its most visible public presence. While ZANU-PF appears to have some concern for its electoral legitimacy, such concerns do not make ZANU-PF inclined to run a fair election or to share power with the MDC. All indications are that ZANU-PF would be happy if the MDC disappeared in the next election.

¶24. (C) Continued: The conflict between MPs and technocrats, the lack of effective communication and consultation with the membership, and general feelings of despondency are serious problems that the party would need to resolve in order to achieve any programs requiring massive coordination. Mudzingwa's suggestion to ignore MPs because what they asked for was stupid was a startlingly naive suggestion on dealing with the problem. The benefits of restructuring based on advice from the ANC consultants may not be fully realized for some time.

¶25. (C) Continued: An armed "adventurist" resistance to the GOZ by a rag-tag group of youths would be doomed to failure at the hands of government security forces. Such resistance would likely result in violent retribution against MDC leaders and members. Notwithstanding the suggestion of adventurism by various MDC leaders, we have no evidence that the risk is real or that any actual preparations are underway. The real question is who might command such activities -- it wouldn't be the MDC.

SULLIVAN